

Malbec tops 5th annual Idaho Wine Competition

By [Andy Perdue](#) on September 23, 2014



Gregg Alger, owner of Huston Vineyards near Caldwell, Idaho, holds up a bottle of his 2012 Malbec. The wine won best in show at the 2014 Idaho Wine Competition. (Photo by Andy Perdue/Great Northwest Wine)

CALDWELL, Idaho — A red grape variety that has gained increasing interest in the Pacific Northwest rose to the top of the fifth annual Idaho Wine Competition.

[Huston Vineyards'](#) 2012 Malbec earned best in show at the competition, which took place Monday at [Ste. Chapelle Winery](#). Huston Vineyards is a small winery on Chicken Dinner Road in Caldwell founded by Gregg and Mary Alger in 2006.

[Coiled Wines](#) in Garden City earned best white wine for its 2013 Dry Riesling. Last year, owner Leslie Preston's 2012 Dry Riesling won best in show — and nearly repeated the feat this year. She also earned a double gold for a red blend called Black Mamba.

[Bitner Vineyards](#) in Caldwell won best dessert wine for its 2012 Late Harvest Riesling.

[Sawtooth Estate Winery](#) in Nampa took home best rosé for its 2013 Classic Fly Series Cinsault Rosé. Sawtooth, one of the state's oldest and largest wineries, also won a unanimous double gold medal for its Tempranillo, as well as gold medals for Petite Sirah, Gewürztraminer and Pinot Gris.

Malbec's bright future in Snake River Valley



Idaho not only has 50 wineries, but it also grows a wide variety of wine grapes, including everything from Riesling to Malbec. (Photo by Andy Perdue/Great Northwest Wine)

Malbec has long been a minor grape in France's Bordeaux region that typically has been blended with other grapes. However, in the New World, Malbec has become a star, particularly in Argentina. In Washington, Malbec has been on the rise for the past half-decade, showing well against the top examples from Argentina's Mendoza region.

In Idaho, Malbec is a relatively new variety, with just 14 acres planted in the vast Snake River Valley. The group of eight judges was especially impressed with the example from Huston Vineyards. Melanie Krause of Cinder Wines in nearby Garden City makes the wines for the Alger family.

"I'm totally impressed with this little variety," Alger told Great Northwest Wine. "I'm trying to get more growers to plant it."

This is Alger's second vintage of Malbec. The 2011 sold out in the first 30 days, and the 2012 edition is likely to go just as quickly, even though he increased production to 250 cases.

He plans to boost his 2013 production to 360 cases, then level off for two or three years until more grapes come into production.

"Our Malbec has gotten huge support from our fans," he said.

The winning 2012 bottling used grapes from Sawtooth Winery's estate vineyard near Nampa.

Smith produces 5 gold medals for Sawtooth



Meredith Smith is the head winemaker at Sawtooth Winery near Nampa, Idaho. (Photo courtesy of Precept Wine)

Two months ago, Meredith Smith was promoted to head winemaker of Sawtooth, so Monday's showing helps validate the decision made by Seattle-based Precept Wine.

"From a winemaker's perspective, it's always a great honor to have these well-respected judges, who have palates from the Northwest and across the United States — not just Idaho judges — come taste these wines and judge and say, 'Yeah, this is good,'" Smith said. "I think the consumer respects the opinions of judges and the results that are published, and that translates into sales and recognition. It all goes hand in hand, and it's all humbling."

Smith showed delicious consistency with her rosé made from Cinsault, having merited the competition's award for best rosé for the second straight year. And Monday's stunning performance by the 2013 Classic Fly Series Cinsault Rosé (\$15) is even more food-friendly than the previous vintage.

"I actually went a little bit less on the residual sugar and a little bit lighter on the color, so it's more of a drier style than it has been in the past," Smith said. "And we sell out every year."

One of the common threads in Monday's competition was the success Idaho winemakers enjoy with grape varieties native to the Rhône Valley of France. Cinsault is a Rhône variety, as is the Sawtooth 2011 Trout Trilogy Petite Sirah.

One of the most aromatic wines of the competition was the Sawtooth 2013 Classic Fly Series Gewürztraminer, which led to another gold medal. Smith, who makes more Pinot Gris than anyone else in the Gem State, was pleased that her 2013 Pinot Gris also earned a gold medal.

"I produce 1,000 cases each year," Smith said. "I have three different blocks, and I work with three different clones at separate times, which allows me to layer them so there are nuances to the wine. And while I always sell out, I still have about 200 cases left."

Sawtooth and the adjacent Skyline vineyards form the breadbasket for much of the Snake River Valley wine industry, producing a number of the top wines in the competition, including Coiled Wines' 2012 Black Mamba, a red blend that features Petit Verdot. The Sawtooth 2012 Classic Fly Series Tempranillo spotlights a red variety that produces historic wines in its home region of the Iberian Peninsula.

"I'm not surprised by the varieties that performed well," Smith said. "Sawtooth sells fruit to so many other wineries and you have different winemaking styles, so it's interesting to see how the wines do."

Idaho Wine Competition draws 150+ entries



Grapes are harvested in Idaho's Snake River Valley. (Photo courtesy of the Idaho Wine Commission)

This year's competition drew more than 150 entries from the Snake River Valley to the Canadian border. The judging panel included: Dan Berger, syndicated wine columnist from Santa Rosa, Calif.; Cole Danehower, a wine writer from Portland; Ken Robertson, a retired newspaper executive and longtime wine writer and international wine judge from Kennewick, Wash.; Mike Rader, a longtime wine judge from Kennewick, Wash.; Ilene Dudunake, owner of A New Vintage Wine Shop in Boise; Kathryn House, a winemaker and wine educator in Boise; Ken McCabe, a wine executive from Seattle; and Jeff Moore, founder of Amphora Wine Co. in Boise.

The [Idaho Wine Commission](#) in Boise, led by executive director Moya Dolsby, helped sponsor the competition. The competition was run by Great Northwest Wine.

"We are thrilled to have the Idaho Wine Competition back in Idaho and are very excited to welcome two additional and well-known judges, Cole Danehower and Dan Berger," Dolsby said. "The number of golds was very impressive this year and proves that the quality of Idaho wine keeps improving every year."

Here are the full results:

Best red and best in show

Huston Vineyards 2012 Malbec, Snake River Valley, \$29

Best white wine

Coiled Wines 2013 Dry Riesling, Snake River Valley, \$17

Best dessert wine

Bitner Vineyards 2012 Late Harvest Reserve Riesling, Snake River Valley, \$19

Best rosé

Sawtooth Estate Winery 2013 Classic Fly Series Cinsault Rosé, Snake River Valley, \$15

Double gold

Coiled Wines 2012 Black Mamba, Snake River Valley, \$30

Sawtooth Estate Winery 2012 Classic Fly Series Tempranillo, Snake River Valley, \$25

Syringa Winery 2011 Tempranillo, Snake River Valley, \$24

Gold

Clearwater Canyon Cellars 2012 Renaissance Red, Idaho/Washington, \$23

Clearwater Canyon Cellars 2012 Umiker Vineyard Syrah, Idaho, \$28

Clearwater Canyon Cellars 2012 Phinny Hill Vineyard Carménère, Washington, \$28

Huston Vineyards 2013 Chicken Dinner Red, Snake River Valley, \$18

Koenig Vineyards 2011 Cuvée Alden Private Reserve, Snake River Valley, \$50

Koenig Vineyards 2012 Sunnyslope Cuvée Riesling, Snake River Valley, \$12

Koenig Vineyards 2011 Three Vineyard Cuvée Syrah, Snake River Valley, \$20

Sawtooth Estate Winery 2011 Trout Trilogy Petite Sirah, Snake River Valley, \$30

Sawtooth Estate Winery 2013 Classic Fly Series Gewürztraminer, Snake River Valley, \$15

Sawtooth Estate Winery 2013 Pinot Gris, Snake River Valley, \$20

Ste. Chapelle Winery 2011 Panoramic Idaho Series Block 16 Chardonnay, Snake River Valley, \$20

Williamson Vineyard 2010 Harvest Moon Red Wine, Snake River Valley, \$20

Silver

Bitner Vineyards 2011 Reserve Chardonnay, Snake River Valley, \$19

Bitner Vineyards 2012 Reserve Riesling, Snake River Valley, \$17

Bitner Vineyards 2008 Col Vincent Reserve Red Dessert Wine, Snake River Valley, \$26

Camas Prairie Winery NV Strawberry Mead, Idaho, \$14

Camas Prairie Winery NV Huckleberry Mead, Idaho, \$15

Cinder Wines 2012 Merlot/Cabernet Sauvignon/Malbec, Snake River Valley, \$29

Cinder Wines 2012 Syrah, Snake River Valley, \$27

Cinder Wines 2012 Tempranillo, Snake River Valley, \$30

Cinder Wines 2013 Dry Viognier, Snake River Valley, \$18

Clearwater Canyon Cellars 2012 Merlot, Idaho/Washington, \$25

Colter's Creek Winery 2013 Estate Chardonnay, Idaho, \$12

Colter's Creek Winery 2012 Estate Merlot, Idaho, \$35

Colter's Creek Winery 2012 Syrah, Snake River Valley, \$15

Colter's Creek Winery 2013 Viognier, Snake River Valley, \$15

Fraser Vineyard 2011 Cabernet Sauvignon, Snake River Valley, \$26

Fraser Vineyard 2011 Couloir Cuvée, Snake River Valley, \$24

Fraser Vineyard 2012 Petit Verdot, Snake River Valley, \$26

Frenchman's Gulch 2012 Chardonnay, Idaho, \$20

Fujishin Family Cellars 2011 Syrah, Snake River Valley, \$22

Fujishin Family Cellars 2012 Mourvèdre, Snake River Valley, \$22

Hat Ranch Winery 2011 Malbec, Snake River Valley, \$27

Huston Vineyards 2012 Merlot, Snake River Valley, \$27

Huston Vineyards 2012 Private Reserve Red, Snake River Valley, \$40

Huston Vineyards 2013 Riesling, Snake River Valley, \$19

Indian Creek Winery 2012 Ragin' Rapids Sweet Riesling, Snake River Valley, \$16

Indian Creek Winery 2012 Syrah, Snake River Valley, \$15

Indian Creek Winery 2012 Tempranillo, Snake River Valley, \$22

Indian Creek Winery 2013 Muscat Canelli, Snake River Valley, \$15

Koenig Vineyards 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon, Snake River Valley, \$20

Koenig Vineyards 2011 Cuvée Amelia Reserve Syrah, Snake River Valley, \$50

Koenig Vineyards 2011 Williamson Vineyard Petite Sirah, Snake River Valley, \$25

Koenig Vineyards 2012 Williamson Vineyard Viognier, Snake River Valley, \$15

Laissez Faire 2013 Red Table Wine, Snake River Valley, \$16

Lindsay Creek Vineyards 2012 Petite Sirah, Washington, \$34

Lost West Winery NV Old Shed White, Snake River Valley, \$11

Potter Wines 2011 Riesling, Snake River Valley, \$12

Sawtooth Estate Winery 2012 Classic Fly Series Chardonnay, Snake River Valley, \$20

Sawtooth Estate Winery 2011 Skyline Red Vineyard Select, Snake River Valley, \$15

Sawtooth Estate Winery 2012 Riesling, Snake River Valley, \$12

Sawtooth Estate Winery 2011 Syrah, Snake River Valley, \$15

Sawtooth Estate Winery 2012 Trout Trilogy Malbec, Snake River Valley, \$35

Small House Winery 2011 La Miscela, Washington, \$16

Small House Winery 2012 Red Blend, Washington, \$17

Ste. Chapelle Winery 2012 Gem State Red, Snake River Valley, \$12

Ste. Chapelle Winery 2013 Special Harvest Riesling, Snake River Valley, \$12

Ste. Chapelle Winery 2011 Treasure Valley Reserves Tempranillo, Snake River Valley, \$20

Ste. Chapelle Winery 2012 Panoramic Idaho Series Grenache, Snake River Valley, \$30

Ste. Chapelle Winery 2011 Panoramic Idaho Series Petit Verdot, Snake River Valley, \$25

Telaya Wine Co. 2011 Turas, Columbia Valley, \$30

Telaya Wine Co. 2013 Viognier, Columbia Valley, \$17

Williamson Vineyard 2010 Sangiovese, Snake River Valley, \$18

Williamson Vineyard 2011 Late Harvest Viognier, Snake River Valley, \$25

Bronze

Bitner Vineyards 2010 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Snake River Valley, \$25

Bitner Vineyards NV Menopause Merlot, Snake River Valley, \$28

Bitner Vineyards 2010 Cabernet/Shiraz, Snake River Valley, \$28

Bitner Vineyards 2011 Petit Verdot/Merlot, Snake River Valley, \$26

Bitner Vineyards 2011 Erletxe Tempranillo, Snake River Valley, \$27

Bitner Vineyards NV High Desert White Coyotes, Snake River Valley, \$15

Bitner Vineyards 2013 Tres Mujeres, Snake River Valley, \$20

Cinder Wines 2013 Chardonnay, Snake River Valley, \$18

Cinder Wines 2013 Off-Dry Viognier, Snake River Valley, \$18

Cinder Wines 2013 Dry Rosé, Snake River Valley, \$16

Clearwater Canyon Cellars 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon, Washington/Idaho, \$28

Cold Springs Winery 2012 Astrology Merlot, Snake River Valley, \$15

Cold Springs Winery 2011 Phrenology Riesling, Snake River Valley, \$10

Cold Springs Winery 2009 Geology Pinot Noir, Snake River Valley, \$15

Fujishin Family Cellars 2013 Chardonnay, Snake River Valley, \$17

Fujishin Family Cellars 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon/Syrah, Snake River Valley, \$22

Fujishin Family Cellars 2010 Amatino Red Blend, Snake River Valley, \$22

Fujishin Family Cellars 2012 Tempranillo, Snake River Valley, \$22

Fujishin Family Cellars 2011 Petite Sirah, Snake River Valley, \$22

Fujishin Family Cellars 2012 Viognier, Snake River Valley, \$15

Fujishin Family Cellars 2013 Reserve Viognier, Snake River Valley, \$16

Fujishin Family Cellars 2012 Late Harvest Chardonnay, Snake River Valley, \$20

Indian Creek Winery 2011 Star Garnet, Snake River Valley, \$14

Indian Creek Winery 2012 Malbec, Snake River Valley, \$22

Indian Creek Winery 2012 Single Barrel 'Stache Melba Moustache Malbec, Snake River Valley, \$30

Indian Creek Winery 2012 Reserve Primitivo, Snake River Valley, \$25

Indian Creek Winery 2013 Unoaked Viognier, Snake River Valley, \$12

Indian Creek Winery 2013 Oaked Viognier, Snake River Valley, \$14

Indian Creek Winery 2013 Mountain Syringa, Snake River Valley, \$14

Koenig Vineyards 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon-Syrah, Snake River Valley, \$25

Laissez Faire 2013 White Table Wine, Snake River Valley 16

Lindsay Creek Vineyards 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon, Washington, \$24

Lindsay Creek Vineyards 2012 Riesling, Washington, \$14

Lindsay Creek Vineyards 2012 Malbec, Washington, \$22

Lost West Winery NV Old Shed Red, Snake River Valley, \$11

Small House Winery 2012 Chardonnay, Idaho, \$10

Snake River Winery 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon, Snake River Valley, \$15

Snake River Winery 2011 GSM, Snake River Valley, \$20

Snake River Winery 2012 Arena Valley Vineyard Riesling, Snake River Valley, \$10

Snake River Winery 2011 Arena Valley Vineyard Sangiovese, Snake River Valley, \$20

Snake River Winery 2012 Arena Valley Vineyard Grenache, Snake River Valley, \$20

Snake River Winery 2011 Touriga Nacional, Snake River Valley, \$18

Snake River Winery 2009 Arena Valley Vineyard Zweigelt, Snake River Valley, \$14

Snake River Winery 2013 Arena Valley Vineyard Orange Muscat, Snake River Valley, \$19

Snake River Winery 2013 Arena Valley Vineyard Rosé of Mourvèdre, Snake River Valley, \$14

Snake River Winery 2006 Arena Valley Vineyard Anarquía, Snake River Valley, \$34

Syringa Winery 2010 Sangiovese, Snake River Valley, \$22

Tetonic Wines 2013 Cowboy Chardonnay, Sonoma Valley

Williamson Vineyard 2010 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Snake River Valley, \$35

Williamson Vineyard 2011 Reserve Petite Sirah, Snake River Valley, \$35

Williamson Vineyard 2013 Lilly White, Snake River Valley, \$12